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LifeTimes
A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL
ISSUE 13 | WINTER 2024





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ABOUT THIS JOURNAL

Seven years ago, the Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging launched the bi-annual publication of LEXINGTON *LifeTimes*: A CREATIVE ARTS JOURNAL with a grant from the FCOA-funded Bright Ideas program. This thirteenth issue showcases the creative talents of 16 seniors who live or work in Lexington.

An editorial board of volunteers sets the criteria for submission and selects entries for inclusion. Distribution is electronic and worldwide with a limited number of copies printed.

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Submission guidelines for future editions as well as information on how to support the Journal and FCOA can be found on the Friends of the Lexington Council on Aging website:

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P.O. Box 344
LEXINGTON, MA 02420

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ON THE COVERS

FRONT:

Three Friends of Winter
an ancient Chinese art motif

BY SON-MEY CHIU
(artwork modified with permission)

BACK:

Deer in the Moon's Light

BY PAM SMITH

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Rocket Surgery

BY JAMES BALDWIN

EVEN THOUGH IT WAS MY 77TH YEAR, I was far from ready to throw in the towel. I was determined to continue learning, and now, retired, I decided it was high time to realize my brilliance as a writer, writ large.

As luck would have it, I found an eight-session memoir writing course offered through Lexington's Community Education Program. Run by a notoriously tyrannous, albeit talented, writing instructor, the course wouldn't be easy.

Not certain that I was up for this sort of rigor, I hesitated at first, then mustered my courage, took the plunge and signed up.

It started innocently enough. My opening salvo, my maiden voyage, as it were, was a brilliant reflection on my first serious girlfriend who I described quite perfectly, as a "blond bombshell."

"Blond bombshell?!" my professor exploded. "You've got to be kidding. That term is so overused it's beyond cliché. Furthermore, it does virtually nothing to describe your girlfriend. We want to know what she looks like, how she walks, talks, thinks. Blond bombshell. Really?"

"Maybe just 'dumb blond' would have been better?" I ventured.

He seemed surprised by my witty response and gave me a look that could kill.

Something told me I was in for a long day.

Sure enough, right off the bat I was in hot water. My writing was, according to my professor, "replete" with problems, not that I was holy in agreement. Structure of sentences was confusing often. Misplaced were modifiers. I often used repeated redundancies. And he added, "Don't even get me started on the malapropisms."

And then there were his favorites—the clichés—not the French family that moved in down the street, by the way. To be honest, I had no idea what they were, but he accused me of often using them, to the extreme, that is to say, frequently.

Not one to cry over spilt milk, I gave it my best shot anyway and tried my hardest not to be repetitious and repetitive and to avoid clichés like the plague. I'd like to say the rest was history, but, unfortunately, it wasn't.

No matter how hard I tried, I just couldn't seem to avoid overused clichés. Using them was second nature to me. I was a natural, the spitting image, the veritable embodiment of a cliché. For me and clichés, when it rained it poured, and it always seemed to be raining.

The problem, though, was that without them, I was literally up the creek without a clue at a loss for words.

He suggested that this, my being at a loss for words, "is probably a blessing," if not for the hole wide world, at least for his class.

I begged to differ. It wouldn't be long before my work would be selling like pancakes. He had a sure bet and threw the author out with the baby. (By the way, when I said that to him, he gave me a look of exasperation. Then he said, "If you're going to use 'em all the time, at least try to get 'em right.")

Mercifully, we reached the term's end. I decided to stop worrying. Throwing caution to the winds, I let my creative juices flow, and it worked. This short memoir is the result. Top drawer I'd say, and just in the nick of time.

To sum it all up, words cannot describe. Everyone seemed to think that the class was so hard, but to me? Hey, it sure wasn't rocket surgery. ♦

Cluster bombs have a quirk –

BY JAYANTHI RANGAN

The bomblets don't explode
All at once but lurk
And layer Cyanide on grief

First my 1996 Hyundai was snagged
Then my routine tension set in –
Of stretching the dollar like a snake's jaw
Till the next paycheck
My six-year-old hiccupped his snotty life
Through his heaving T-shirt
His best friend had found a new best friend

At Lexington Center I waited for the walk sign
When the light blinked I did too
Rooted I heard the traffic roar
And the water table of my eyes
Vaguely saw a stranger
Who walked past and then came back –
"May I give you a hug?"
I nodded and he gave –

A tourniquet for my disturbed mind
An eye for the walk-sign

Glasses with Red Frames: 1945

BY ALICE S. LEVENTHAL

I remember thinking
I was special
when I was a little girl
in my glasses with red frames.
I viewed an expanding universe
full of possibilities for me
the year I was in first grade.

I thought I looked smart
in my glasses with red frames—
like a secretary.

I couldn't wait for friends
to see me,
I didn't know
behind my back
they called me four eyes.

I did know
it was how they
told us apart—
me from my twin sister.

I thought I looked glamorous
in my glasses with red frames
like my mother
when she was a secretary.

In old yellowed photographs
she wore stylish outfits,
matching hats and shoes
and worked in the city.
She took shorthand
and typed real fast
before she married and
became a housewife and mother.

When we were older,
my sister told me
others said she was
the "pretty one" and
I was the "smart one."

I thought, "How silly,"
and wondered why
we could only be
one or the other.

I wanted
to be like my mother
before she married,
when she worked.
I wanted
to be like my father,
after they married,
when he had both
children and a career.

I thought, "How silly,"
and wondered why
women could only have
one or the other—
Men had a better view.

I came of age
at the start of the
feminist revolution.
We thought
we could have it all
and I did—
though it wasn't easy.

No longer
the innocent
little girl
in glasses with red frames.

Light on the Landscape

In his travels, photographer ALAN ERTEL tries to capture the glory of the seasons in our country. These landscapes celebrate the scenic beauty of the American West and our National Parks. The images were taken in Alaska, Utah, California, and Arizona.



Point Retreat Sunset, Alaska (Spring, 2018)



Mesa Arch, Sunrise (Summer, 2019)



Pierce Point Ranch, California (Fall, 2005)



After the Storm, Grand Canyon (Winter, 2012)

You Can Go Home Again

BY DEBORAH WEINER SOULE

IN THE SUMMER OF 1972, I was part of an Experiment in International Living trip to Greece, along with about 12 other college-aged students from around the US. After a few days of international training (how to be a good guest; how to speak at least a few words in Greek; and how to get all we needed in one suitcase, not two) we headed to Bradley International Airport and took off. I'd never been out of North America before, so I was excited to stop in Amsterdam, Brussels, and then on to Athens. Those of us who had not taken the two-week intensive language course in Greek were told we'd be placed with families who spoke English. And so, when we arrived in Athens and got on a bus headed for Ioannina, in the north-central part of the country where we would be living, I figured I'd talk with my family about all kinds of things.

I was shocked to learn that I'd been placed with a family who spoke no English, except for the Uncle – George – who had learned a bit of English during World War II from American soldiers. The Tsingeli family had three daughters: Elena, Vaso, and Hara, ages 15, 11, and 5. The mother and father – Marika and Alexis – lived in an apartment with Uncle George and Marika's mother, who everyone called "Yaya" and who was a bit obsessed with my waist-length hair, which she thought should be cut. I found her one night, standing over me with a pair of scissors, but managed to evade the trim. Although I sobbed and was homesick for a

couple of days, I had a little talk with myself and realized that if I was going to make this thing work, I needed to learn Greek. And so, Uncle George and I made a deal: every day, at the mid-day meal, we would teach each other words: "káthe méra, eíkosi léxeis" ("every day, twenty words").



Elena, Debbie and Hara, 1972

Elena and I had fun, although she was younger than me. We went to the lake in the center of the town, met the other students and their hosts, went on day trips to the beautiful Ionian coastal town of Parga and the cliff monasteries of Meteora. And we learned about each other's cultural lives. I learned about roasting lamb on a spit, about the Greek Orthodox religion and how it influenced the family's lives, and played

with the younger children. I made the family an adapted "American" meal from what I could buy at the markets in town (no grocery stores, just different vendors): ground veal for hamburgers, baked potatoes with yogurt and butter instead of sour cream, chocolate cake for dessert. At night I would walk into town and talk to a friend of the family, a Communist who had been jailed at the start of the junta now in power. The monarchy had been overthrown a year before I arrived in Greece, and soldiers were everywhere – but Alexandros Bistas filled me in on politics through his eyes.

I ended my homestay with tears and sadness, vowing to come back to Ioannina. Our group traveled on to the Peloponnese and the island of Spetses, and then...I flew

home, and back to college and my life as an average American young woman. I never stopped dreaming of Greece – but I never went back.

That was, until the fall of 2022. My husband Ben and I decided to go on vacation to Greece. We traveled to Athens, to the same parts of the Peloponnese that I had visited, to a country that no longer was under military control but still had huge economic challenges. I soaked up every bit of the music, the dancing, the food, the antiquities. We had worked in a trip to Ioannina, because I wanted to show Ben where I had lived. We stayed in a hotel near the street where I used to live, and planned to walk to the apartment the next morning. “What I want to know is whether you have enough chutzpah to ring the doorbell,” he said. “Maybe” I replied.

In the morning we set out – a short walk on a warm fall morning. We arrived at the apartment and started reading the names on the doorbells. Two of the names said “Tsingeli” – one of them was for Hara, and one for her older sister, Vaso. We couldn’t believe it: they were still there! As we tried to figure out the next step, a delivery man showed up. Timidly, we asked if he spoke English, and he nodded. We explained that we were looking for the family I had lived with fifty years ago. He had a key to the front door and told us to come in, led us up the stairs – to the apartment where I had lived – and rang the bell. Hara came out and in Greek, he told her who I was. And...she remembered me!

Laughing, speaking Greek and French

and crying, she invited us in. Her daughter Kryssa, a taxi driver who spoke English, was there, and so was a friend, a Greek American from Chicago who had moved to Greece several years before. The friend commenced to translate, and Hara called her sister Vaso – who indeed lived in the next apartment – to come over. Vaso arrived and called Elena, who had gone to work. Elena apparently told the family they must be wrong – how could Debbie the American be there in the apartment – but jumped in a taxi and came to the house. And there we all were – speaking three languages, sobbing, laughing, remembering. It was, literally, an unbelievable turn of fate. But it was real. They remembered the cake I made, the long hair, the wedding we’d gone to in the mountains...all of it. It was glorious.

I had not, in the ensuing years since my first visit, thought about using a translation app or trying to connect. I should have realized it was possible, years ago, but I had disappeared into my own too-busy life. But I never forgot. And I remain thunderstruck that the family traditions in Greece run deep and strong, and that my family was still in the apartment building where they had lived when I first came to town.

We had to leave Ioannina too soon, and as I write this now, I am yearning to go back. I’m in touch with Elena and Vaso and Kryssa via social media (Hara does not use a computer, alas) but with the help of translation apps, we are staying in touch. And the most beautiful part of it all is that I found out you can go home...and the people you love may still be there, to welcome you in the front door. ♦



Elena, Debbie, Hara, and Vaso in front of the Ioannina apartment on Vilara Street, 2022.

Neighbors Connecting #3

BY TAMARA HAVENS

The sun sets between fluttering
leaves, soon to be transformed
into a golden ball between two trees.
My son struggles setting the temperature
of a grill just assembled.
I watch for puffs
of smoke swirling above
the blue flame.

Tables are set on the grass
for the young, on the deck for the older.
A circle forms. Young kids bring up
the fun of learning to sail. A teen flashes
the picture of the sailboat
he sailed, recalls the fun of skipping
through the water. My husband shares
how he sailed his parents' sailboat
as a teen along the Eastern coast along
the "briny blue" and against the wind!
Stories of sailing begin to bind them
like little streams flowing together.

Later for dessert, young kids call out
the names of knots learned
in sailing. Older ones try to stump them
as in a quiz show. Soon they all flow down
the stairs like a brook on their way
to play badminton in a neighboring yard.

But also, mothers born
in different countries share their stories
of how they emigrated to the U.S.—survival,
sleeplessness, and hard work—
but feel deep gratitude
for being here. We sense a secret
tie to each other, streams
flowing together.

Later the mother of the youngest boy
asks him about the train and its sounds.
He takes his right leg and arm and cycles
it like a locomotive, muttering "choo...choo"
and breaks into a smile.
We smile, laugh and ride the train with him.

And I can hear streams
flowing together
into brooks which will surge
into a pond
someday into a river,
a river of humanity,
according to God's plan.

Not Gingerbread

BY SARA ARNOLD

WASHINGTON D.C., DECEMBER 1943: Two years had passed since the bombing of Pearl Harbor. It was six months before the Invasion of Normandy. My cousins Linda Lee and Phil, ages eight and six, talked of the Christmas candy house that their mother made each year. It was a house made with chocolate bars—NOT gingerbread—surrounded by white frosting snow and decorated with a variety of sweets that made their eyes sparkle, their mouths water, and their fingers eager to touch. My aunt tried to explain that sugar was rationed and all chocolate was being sent to the troops.

My mother, just weeks away from giving birth to me, went shopping. I picture crowds jostling her as she joined a line, having no idea what was being sold but knowing that a line meant a limited supply of some treasure. I can see her feet slightly ajar, shoulders squared, and arms pulling her winter coat around her bulging belly with a quiet determination. Just imagine the surprising reward: six chocolate bars. Mom returned triumphantly to the tiny Maryland house that my parents shared with my aunt, uncle and my visiting grandmother.

I picture my two-year-old sister with her quizzical eyebrows trying to comprehend Linda Lee and Phil's excitement. Sugar, water, salt, and cream of tartar were measured into the top of the double boiler. Eggs were carefully separated for the whites since a

speck of yolk would ruin the frosting. They had to beat that egg white mixture for seven minutes over boiling water. Soft and billowy frosting gradually emerged. I wonder, did they have an electric mixer?



The author's party with two candy houses (1951)

Then the chocolate was opened and anticipation turned to dismay. The bars had broken into myriad little pieces. Linda Lee remembers our mothers painstakingly sticking those chocolate puzzle pieces onto the frosted sides of

a cardboard frame house, reconstructing the bars as best they could.

DECEMBER 1948: We lived in our own house in Washington D.C., next door to Ruth and Paul Koczela and son Bobby, the first of six children soon to follow. Part of the constant back and forth between the two homes was the annual candy house constructions. Mom and Ruth each covered a 12 by 18 inch cardboard base with aluminum foil. They marked an area for a lake in a front corner. Cardboard houses were sized to accommodate one-and-a-half Hershey bars each on the front and back and half that amount on the sides. A steep cardboard roof rested on top.

We spread fluffy white frosting all over our cardboard base, carefully avoiding the lake. We slathered each little house and gently placed it in a corner. Then came

the chocolate bars, each pressed into the frosting. We encircled the houses with green gumdrop bushes. M&Ms often marched around the lake, while red hots dotted the roof top. A border fence was created with an assortment of caramels, gum drops, tootsie rolls, Hershey kisses, all stuck together with frosting. And there was always a grand entrance where the fence met the chocolate nonpareil stepping stones that led to the front door. Paul Koczela used his cake decorating tools from a previous life to meticulously draw frosting doors, windows, and wreathes on the chocolate house and then add icicles that hung from the eaves. Mom covered paper cones with green frosting and sprinkled them with tiny colored candy balls to make outdoor Christmas trees. We used four—always four—red lifesavers with frosting mortar for the chimney. It would lean and inevitably slip down the steep roof. With moans and cheers, we would nudge it back in place until finally the frosting set enough to hold it upright with a whimsical tilt.

I gazed at this snowy fairyland and imagined all kinds of magical happenings. Best of all was the knowledge that we would eat both candy houses at my birthday on January 10, happily ignoring the dust that would accumulate until then. I can still feel the brittle pieces of frosting melt into pure sugar on my tongue. My sister Peggy loved the cherry chimney lifesavers. They became my favorite too, and we competitively reached for them. Eating the candy house always made my birthday party better than anyone else's.

SOME 25 YEARS LATER, I was making candy houses with my own children. They warmed pieces of caramel in their hands and molded them into dogs. Split tootsie rolls became a wood pile. Sticks of gum served as a bridge

over the kidney-shaped lake, while other pieces were cut into skis that leaned against the chocolate house.

Eventually my children outgrew this tradition. My relief was unexpected. It was one less thing to do for Christmas.

DECEMBER 2001: My son, Eric, called on the phone: "Mom, can we start the candy house tradition with Kylie?" Granddaughter Kylie was 2½; her brother, a newborn. I was flattered and pleased. We included their friends. Each year, I gathered the ingredients, made the cardboard house frames for both families, and served macaroni and cheese to counteract the sugar highs. In 2010, my daughter, Ali, returned to the Boston area with her husband and their two-year-old Ben, adding to the construction chaos.

As the candy-house yards expanded, I found myself making three and sometimes four batches of seven minute frosting, always remembering Mom's caution, "Don't beat it too long or it turns lumpy like cottage cheese." Families added zip lines, ski lifts, a Santa falling off his skis, ice fishing, docks and rafts, outdoor camp fires, a tree house, and a variety of animals all made from candy. Yet at the heart of each construction was the original chocolate house with candy fence, pond with a bridge, and nonpareil stepping stones.

IN DECEMBER 2016, I sent photos of these candy house creations to Ruth Koczela, then 95. Her son Jack reported that they had made 13 candy houses that year—most of which were being donated to a center for underprivileged children. And Ruth, my dear Ruth, my second mother from those D.C. days, was still covering cardboard bases with aluminum foil. I have shared this memoir with her. How I wish I could have shared all these beautiful memories with my mom. ♦

Poetic Abstractions

SIRARPI HEGHINIAN WALZER'S art springs from meditations on nature and from memories that are distilled into single dramatic moments. The energetic surfaces imply an ongoing tension between freedom and containment, edging the viewer closer to that place where chaos can erupt into clarity. The deliberate juxtapositions of forms and exaggerations of color choices provide clues to content and interpretation. These works are part of her Dialogue with Nature series.



Mixed Media, oil (2022)

20" x 26"



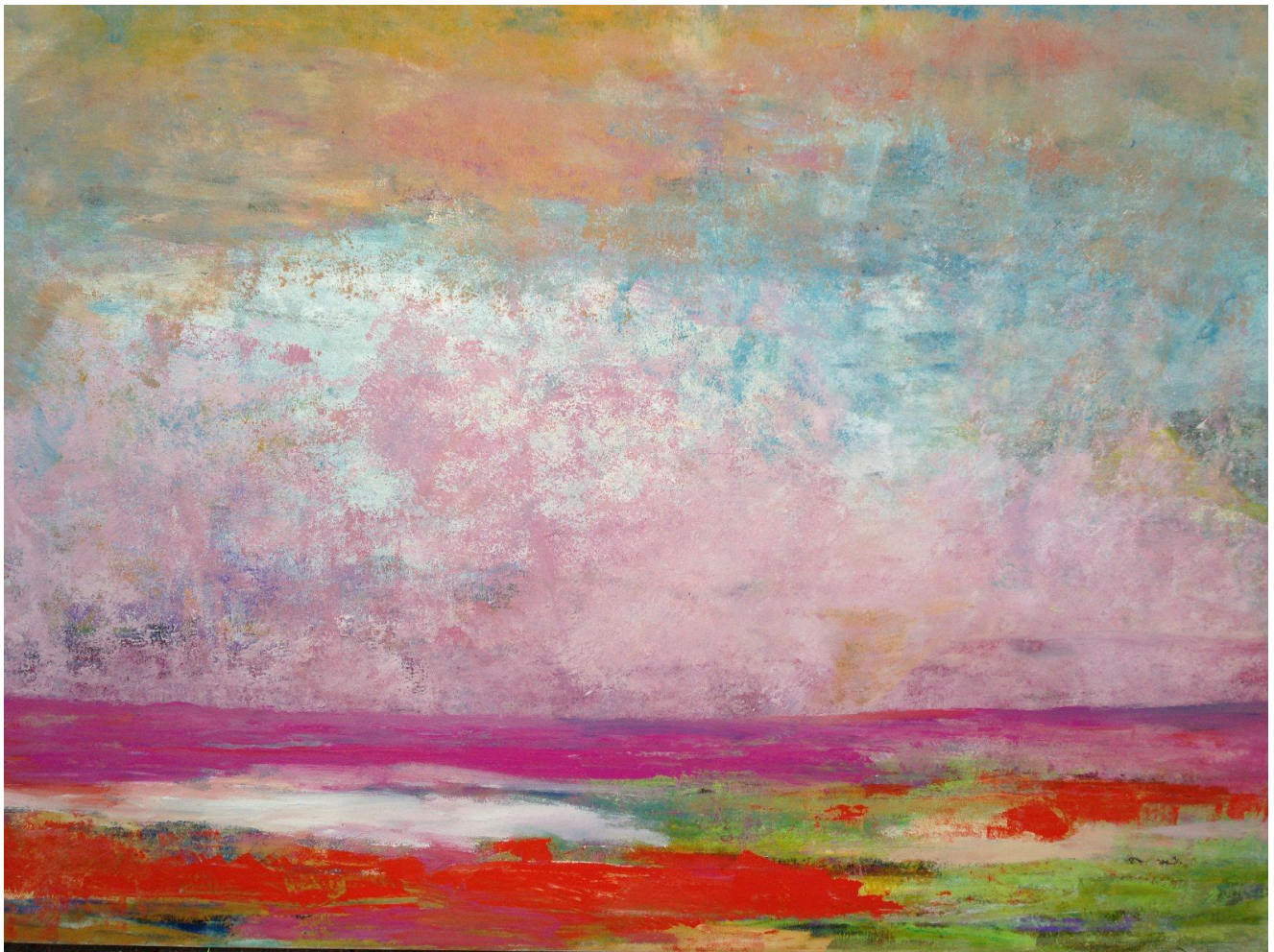
Mixed Media, acrylic (2022)

24" x 24"



Mixed Media, acrylic (2022)

12" x 12"



Mixed Media, oil (2022)

20" x 28"

How I Turned my SAD Life Around

BY KIRAN MUNDY

THIRTEEN YEARS AGO, I was a shy person. I recall peeping through the curtains of my house wanting to ensure the coast was clear of neighbors before darting to my car to go to the store. My heart would beat faster as I approached the checkout counter. I feared the clerk would ask me, “How’re you doing?”

How do you even respond to “How’re you doing”? Am I expected to describe my day? Perplexed, I once asked an American friend who said—you say “Hi,” or you can say whatever you’re thinking.

Say “whatever you’re thinking ...”?

I was five years post-therapy before I understood what they meant. But I’m getting ahead of my story.

One evening we invited our neighbors over for dinner. I remember forcing laughter at jokes I did not get, talking brightly to fill pauses and drinking too much.

Afterward, I lay in bed, wide awake. I was re-living mortifying moments from the past evening, over and over. When I couldn’t stand it any longer, I took myself downstairs and googled “embarrassment at dinner.”

A trail of links led to the discovery that it was not my personality that was the problem, but a condition called “social anxiety disorder” or SAD.

I had been shy all my life and never realized it was considered a disorder.

In India, where I grew up, shyness is a desirable trait in a female. In my teen years, I hid happily behind the approved label.

But now, I had lived in the US for 20 years. I held a job, had friends, pretended to be outgoing and fooled most people.

This was at an enormous cost. Every

interaction, with strangers, acquaintances, or even worse, groups of people, was agonizing and exhausting.

I was determined to find a way to “fix” this disorder.

Google surfaced a 12-week study on cognitive behavior therapy for social anxiety at Boston University’s CARD—Center for Anxiety & Related Disorders.

I sent an email, completed a stack of questionnaires, underwent an interview and took the Liebowitz test of social anxiety to qualify rating somewhere between “marked” and “severe” social phobia.

I joined the study.

I learned a bunch of stuff I already knew: That I was focusing on negative reactions to me, etc., etc. Though knowing it did not help very much, it did set me up for the next stage of treatment.

These exposure sessions were the key. The therapist helped me set up “anxiety-provoking” tasks for myself. I would do the task (under distant supervision). I would discuss the interaction with the therapist and understand what actually happened.

Here’s an example of the sessions.

The first session: Speak on a topic you know nothing about, in front of strangers, with no preparation. After you run out of things to say, keep standing there doing nothing. Every 3–4 minutes, the therapist asks you to assess your anxiety on a 1–10 scale. You assess your anxiety at 10 a couple of times, then at 8 and 7, and finally at 2, because by then, you’re feeling ... bored.

You’re finally allowed to sit down.

What you learn is, that no matter how anxious you get, if you simply do nothing,

the anxiety dissipates. This was a very helpful experience. I often used it later.

There were other sessions in the series and they were also difficult. But I recall feeling a thrill after completing each one. The debrief at the end of each session helped me internalize that people were not judging me. I had improved a little by the end of twelve weeks. I was nowhere near “cured.”

The process that started with those 12 weeks continued for the next 12 years. Each year, I was a little more at ease in a wider set of situations. My stress levels started melting away. I started looking for more socially stressful situations. I would try them out and realize I was able to generalize the lessons I had learned. I was able to relax in these situations as well.

After about 7–8 years, I realized, to my surprise, that I was more outgoing and comfortable than many of the people I met. Other changes had taken place inside me that were key to my overcoming Social Anxiety.

They distill down to six changes—the first being the most important and the hardest.

Closing Off the Meta Chatter in Your Head: “Meta” thoughts are when you spend a lot of energy prepping and reviewing what you’re about to say. This occupied a very large part of my brain. Once I learned to undo this, it freed up energy and spontaneous responses I never realized I had inside me.

The closest example is learning to meditate. The meta chatter keeps invading. I had to practice gently turning it away and keeping my focus on the conversation. I don’t think I could have advanced without mastering this.

Step Aboard a Stranger’s Train: When having a conversation with anyone, “step aboard their train” and share their journey with them. What they describe turns into a movie where you are an active observer. Ask questions to fill in the blanks in the movie.

This makes even boring conversations more interesting. Small talk can often change course and turn into lively conversation. It also helps in staying away from meta thoughts.

Express Unfiltered Thoughts: When a thought comes, express it unfiltered. Although I would be concerned about what the other person would think and feel, I realized that transparency made for much more interesting conversations. I learned to stay away from platitudes and polite responses—they distance you from people.

Comfort With Silence & Pauses: I grew comfortable with pauses and silences, where my thoughts had drifted off for a few moments.

Talking With Shy People: Ironically, it’s hard to put other shy people at ease. When I was shy, I talked a lot to avoid an awkward silence. But the silence was awkward only because of all the meta chatter in my head. Once that was gone, real thoughts came to me. I had the option of sharing the thought if I wanted to. The awkwardness melted away.

Shy people often listen with half an ear. Like my former self, they’re thinking of what to say next. Asking about something they cared about would sometimes get them talking freely.

Custodian of My Body & Mind: This is the most important thing that helped me to “become myself.” I started to think of my inner core as a person separate from “me.” This “inner me” was the true hero of the story and my goal was to set this inside person free.

Those twelve short weeks, with a 2-hour commitment to go in every week, were the best investment I’ve made in my life. I’m very, very glad I took that step. The results far exceeded what I ever thought possible. ♦

American Dystopia

BY TARA MENON

Deep in my couch, lounging in terror,
I tell myself I must not retrieve
a wayward basketball from a stranger's yard.
I can't afford to slip into the wrong car anymore.
I must check if the address is correct
multiple times before I ring a doorbell,
and I should remember an old man
in a house could be scared of the color of my skin
or hate my race and fire a gun at me.
I mustn't let my friend take me in her car
into the wrong driveway
because even after she realizes
her mistake and reverses
a bullet may shatter the windshield,
creating a cracked spider web,
and blood may pour out of my forehead.

It used to be I was only worried
about overtaking cars or riding too slowly
and getting into arguments with drivers.

Now one foot in a wrong territory
could be my last step.
We have begun descending
into an American stand your ground,
right to own gun, might is right,
download a 3D gun blueprint
while weapons proliferate like sharp blades of grass,
that will be drenched in blood,
a scenario Walt Whitman couldn't have foreseen.
Even a four-year-old in diapers
brandishes a silver and black handgun.
Bang, bang, you're dead is now a real life game.

Unchecked, destruction has infinite creative ways.
Soon there will only be guns and rifles.
They'll remove us before we can disarm ourselves.

Patterns and Aging

Photographer SHERWIN LEHRER looks for patterns that might escape an initial glance. He finds beauty in old objects even though they are past their prime.



Fallen Leaf (2022)



Fallen Leaves 1 (2022)

Ask Uncle Fred

BY MARY LEVIN KOCH

MY GRANDDAUGHTER HAILEY and her great-uncle Fred met on two occasions: once when Hailey was an infant and again at a family wedding when she was three. Although the encounters were brief, the preschooler and the eighty-year-old retired professor bonded, and now, whenever Hailey poses a question I am unable to answer, she says, “I’ll just have to ask Uncle Fred.” So, while preparing to visit Fred in Virginia this spring, Hailey and I compile a list of questions.

Hailey and Fred have a lot in common. Both enjoy bicycling—Hailey pedals up and down the hills of our neighborhood, and Fred rides along mountain trails near his home. Hailey, always curious, loves to talk about her expanding world. Her great-uncle is well known for his intellect and quick wit. Sitting in a favorite coffee shop, Fred famously holds forth on local and world events. Why wouldn’t Hailey look to him for answers?

But last winter Fred suffered a stroke, and his powers of observation were compromised. He now resides in a senior care facility about forty miles from his home, and this is where my sister, Fred’s wife of 58 years, my brother, my husband, Hailey and I are headed. When we arrive at the facility, Hailey jumps out of the car, eager to see Uncle Fred waiting at the entrance.

Fred is outwardly changed. The jaunty pace is gone, replaced by a cautious shuffle; he is pale and thinner. Fred guides us through the public rooms and introduces us to members of the staff before taking us to his room—neat and clean though sparsely decorated with only a few personal items scattered around. Fred sits down on the bed, where he seems most at ease. I sit down next to him

and Hailey plops down beside me. Then I pull out the list.

What is my birthstone?

I remind Fred that Hailey was born in late January, and he says, “Garnet.” This question is a softball for a retired geology professor.

When trees fall, do they turn to stone?

“Yes”, he tells us. “If trees get buried and there’s pressure and heat from the earth, the trees will turn into petrified wood.”

What did you eat for breakfast two days ago?

After a short memory check, Fred answers, “O.J., grits and cream of wheat.”

Where do people come from?

Staring straight ahead, Fred replies, “From other people.” He doesn’t mean to be ironic, or does he? Then follows the final question, one that has vexed humankind throughout history and, to my surprise, five-year-old Hailey as well.

What is God?

Fred, a scientist and a humanist, pauses before answering “God created the earth.”

Satisfied, Hailey stands up, ready for lunch. We all follow her lead and gather our belongings. I look around the room before leaving and think, despite everything that has happened to Fred, his answers to an inquisitive preschooler are a sign, a sign that the person I have known for six decades is not defeated. Fred is still Fred. ♦

Where Edges Meet

CASSANDRA GOLDWATER uses photography to reflect on current events and histories both personal and political. Many of her images combine found objects, the interplay of the natural environment and imagination, the magic of light and the wonder of making.



Attachments (2023)



Lotus Eyes (2023)

Running on Empty

BY BEN SOULE

THIS IS A STORY ABOUT MEMORIES and memory. It's actually two stories about events in my life that took place decades apart.

The first story took place in 1970. I had just finished my first year at Hamilton College. A year before, my grandmother had given me a gift of \$300 as a high school graduation present, and I was planning to spend it on a trip out west to hike in the Rocky Mountains.

I was an avid backpacker, camper, and mountain hiker, but all my experience was in the White Mountains of New Hampshire and the Adirondacks of New York State. I was nineteen and eager for bigger experiences.

I had two weeks to squeeze in a road/hiking trip before my summer job started, so I opted for Rocky Mountain National Park, which was a shorter drive than the more



glamorous Glacier Park. I had recruited three hiking buddies – Chris from Lexington, with whom I had done a lot of outings with my Boy Scout Explorer Post, and Craig and Jim, friends from Hamilton College. My dad offered his almost-new Ford station wagon, a generous offer as I look back on it. Would I have lent my car to four 19-year-olds to drive across the country?

Chris and I set off from Lexington about 6 a.m. one day in early June. We picked up Jim just off the Mass Pike in Grafton, his hometown, and headed to Craig's in Cincinnati, almost 900 miles away. But we were 19, so we got there by midnight, despite getting lost because of a construction detour. A day and a half later, we got our first glimpse of the Front Range at Denver, and we were camping in the Park that night.

After several days of hiking, including a bivouac in a snowfield on the steep slope of a 12,000 footer, we found ourselves short on supplies and decided to drive into Estes Park to stock up and have a beer. Estes Park is a town just outside the entrance to the park and hundreds of feet lower in altitude. On the way out of the Park, I was driving. The gas gauge was sitting on E, and I had the brilliant idea that I could just shut off the engine and coast as far as we could. And that's what I did. Well, this was my dad's first car that had a steering wheel lock on it, so that when the ignition was off, the wheel could not be turned. You can see where this is going. We were heading for a sharp right curve in the road – no guard rail, large drop. I remember thinking, "Whatever I just did, I should just undo it." So I turned the ignition back on, the wheel unlocked, and I was able to negotiate the turn easily with about four seconds to spare. Which is why I am able to relate this story these many years later.

So that's the first story. The rest of the trip involved getting snowed on, packing up and heading south, driving across New Mexico and Texas to New Orleans, then heading north to Cincinnati and home to Massachusetts. We were young, gas was cheap, and we made memories to last a lifetime.

The second story is the more interesting part, and it's about how memory works ... or doesn't work. For years, Jim volunteered to make calls to Hamilton College alums when the Annual Fund drive came around. I would get a call from him, we'd chat for a few minutes, I'd make my pledge, and we'd say goodbye 'til the next time. One year, maybe 15 years ago, we were talking, and he asked if I remembered our trip to Colorado. "Sure," I said.

"And you remember when we were driving into Estes Park and we were almost out of gas?"

"Oh, yeah."

"And I shut off the car, and the wheel locked as we were heading for a curve?" he continued.

"Wait a minute," I said, "I was driving."

"No, I'm sure I was."

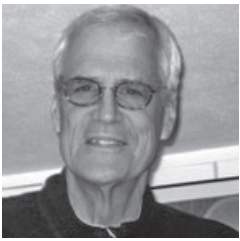
"Jim..." I could see we were getting nowhere, so we agreed to disagree, and said goodbye.

So who was driving the car? One of us is right, and something strange happened in the way the other has remembered the incident over the years. I tell this story often to illustrate that no matter what we think we remember, we have to be cautious about what we think is true. I attended my 50th Reunion at Hamilton this June. Craig was there, but he doesn't remember who was driving, and Jim didn't attend. And that's fine with me because it allows me to continue being secure in the knowledge that it really was me! ♦

CONTRIBUTORS



A resident of Lexington for 51 years, SARA ARNOLD raised two children while volunteering in the library and schools. Originally a teacher, in 1979 she was instrumental in starting Lexpress. Transportation-related professional positions followed. Now retired, she remains an advocate for public transportation.



JAMES BALDWIN is a retired advertising agency principal and high school English teacher. Rediscovering writing in his retirement, he maintains his own blog at www.Storyguy.net.



SON-MEY CHIU is the Inceptor and Instructor Emerita of Chinese Language/Culture at the Boston Latin School. She holds a Doctor of Education degree from Harvard University. After her retirement, she devotes herself to art and writing, her favorite pursuits.



ALAN ERTEL has been a resident of Lexington since 1989. He is a retired orthopedic hand surgeon, and a long-term amateur landscape photographer with a love of traveling and the outdoors.

CASSANDRA GOLDWATER is a photographer, a maker, and a teacher. She has studied photography extensively and teaches courses in writing and literature at Lesley University where she also mentors graduate students in the MFA Writing program in word/image projects. A member of LexArt, she lived in Lexington for more than two decades before moving to Lowell.



TAMARA HAVENS, a retired ESL teacher, was born in Egypt to Russian-born parents. She volunteers teaching English to internationals in several communities. Her work explores her family's struggle to escape persecution in Egypt by moving to America.



With degrees from the Universities of Wisconsin and Georgia, MARY LEVIN KOCH has worked in art museums, published scholarly articles and coauthored a book on Athens, Georgia. Now retired she chronicles her family's history and their current comings and goings!



SHERWIN (SAM) LEHRER is a retired research scientist who made photos from the '50s and '60s after work and family. He has been a mostly Lexington resident since 1967 and his family continues to occupy the house they originally built.





ALICE S. LEVENTHAL is an identical twin and mother of identical twin daughters. She has been a psychologist in private practice for over 50 years and is writing a memoir, *Dear Alice: Love Letters From A Lonely Boy*.



TARA MENON'S poetry, fiction, and essays have been published in many journals. A finalist for the 2020 Willow Run Poetry Book Award, her latest fiction has appeared in "Armstrong Literary," "The Hong Kong Review," and "Litro."



KIRAN MUNDY retired from High Tech in 2016 and now spends her time playing tennis and trying to learn new skills like learning to grade a gravel road or how to wire your own home.



JAYANTHI RANGAN has taught science and breathed it all her life. Her short stories have appeared in numerous publications. Her poetry is mostly topical and has appeared in Poet's Choice and anthologies.



PAM SMITH spent 42 years as an elementary school teacher and administrator. Now retired, she has followed her other passion and become an artist.



BEN SOULE has lived in Lexington for most of his life. Professionally he has worked as a carpenter/contractor and a software engineer. He expresses his creativity through singing, acting, writing, woodworking, designing board games, and creating original Christmas cards.



DEBORAH WEINER SOULE is a religious professional who works with Unitarian Universalist congregations experiencing transitions. She is the owner of a small catering business, The Delicious Dish.



SIRARPI HEGHINIAN WALZER is principal of Consult and Design, a small business IT consulting firm and serves as vice president of the board of Nonprofit Net where she has directed IT system management and governance committees. An artist whose work is in many collections nationally and internationally, Sirarpi has received awards and exhibited her work in galleries throughout Europe and the United States. Her website is www.walzer.com. ♦

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